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AUTHOR Sheppard, Harold L.; Streib, Gordon F.
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ABSTRACT

This document consists of facts and impressions gathered during 1984, in the course of an 18-day visit to the Peoples Republic of China by a team of epidemiologists and gerontologists from the United States. The major portion of the paper presents demographic, economic, and social perspectives on aging in China. It is noted that China remains a heavily rural society; that the current population target for the year 2000 is 1.2 billion; and that life expectancy in Shanghai and Beijing has reached 73 years. Economic and cultural reasons for high fertility and/or birth rates in rural areas are discussed. Filial responsibility and the implications for caregiving of China's one-child per couple policy are considered. The influence of Marxism regarding population control is examined, the functioning of the pension system in China is discussed, and the formation and functioning of local gerontological organizations in China are described. A section on closing observations compares and contrasts the growth in urban areas of nuclear families and the increase in rural areas of the traditional Chinese extended family. A list of the visiting team members and the major places visited is included. (NB)

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AGING IN CHINA

by
Harold L. Sheppard
Director
International Exchange Center on Gerontology
University of South Florida
and
Gordon F. Streib
Graduate Research Professor
Center for Gerontological Studies
University of Florida

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INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE CENTER ON GERONTOLOGY
at the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA
A Multi-University Consortium

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by
Harold L. Sheppard
Director
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I. Introduction

The essay that follows consists of facts and tentative impressions (mostly impressions) gathered in a brief 18-day visit to the Peoples Republic of China, in late May and early June of 1984 -- as a member of a team of epidemiologists and gerontologists assembled by Professor William Liu of the University of Illinois at Chicago. The list of the team members and the major places visited are printed at the end of the essay. I want to express special appreciation of the generosity and helpfulness of Professor Liu, and the hospitality of our primary hosts in China, the Shanghai Psychiatric Institute, and the Beijing Medical College. The names of most of the persons we met at two major institutions are also cited below, along with others met by the team and/or by myself individually during this first sojourn for me in China.

Very special thanks are due the following experts who generously suggested additions and modifications to the early draft of this essay: Xiangmong Chen, Duke University; Deborah Davis-Friedmann, Yale University; Harvey Nelsen and Peter Kong-Ming New, both at the University of South Florida; and William Liu.

The primary purpose for my visit was to initiate preliminary discussions that hopefully will culminate in a regular program of mutually beneficial exchange between the International Exchange Center's affiliated gerontological units and other Floridian organizations, on the one hand, and major centers of aging in China, on the other.

II. Demographic, Economic, and Social Perspective

A critical perspective within which the Chinese aging phenomenon should be viewed is a socio-economic and demographic one. Liu Zheng, in his chapter on "Population" in China's Socialist Modernization (edited by Yu Guangyuan)* points, first of all, to the overwhelming, dominating fact of China still being a heavily rural society. China, in other words, is still a "developing" society. The solution for many of China's problems depends in "large measure on solving the problems of the 800 million rural people." Economic development has not been very satisfactory, according to Liu, which he blames to a very great extent on the Cultural Revolution that, for ten long years, set back the process of social and economic development. More recently, however, there are some encouraging signs of positive economic development.

The current population target for the year 2000 is 1.2 billion, which would still amount to an increase of 165 million persons. However, I doubt if China's population can be kept as low as 1.2 billion after the next 15 years. For one thing, the one-child-per-family policy is difficult to implement, especially in rural areas. But more important, it is quite possible that medical and public health progress in China will reduce the death rate far more than recent population projections assume, thus increasing the population more than is now anticipated.

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*Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1984.

Life expectancy has indeed improved in China, a testimony to that progress. We learned, for example, that in Shanghai and Beijing, life expectancy has now reached 73 (it is about 68 for the country as a whole) whereas in 1949 it was only 43 in those cities. A leap from 43 to 73 in 30 years is virtually a miracle, and a testimony to the great strides in public health in China.* An equally sensitive measure for gerontologists is life expectancy at a given "older" age, in the case of China, age 60. From 1953-64 to 1964-82, average life expectancy for 60 year-old Chinese men increased from 10.0 to 14.5 years; for women, from 12.3 to 16.4 years. (See accompanying table)

Table I

Male and Female Life Expectancy at Birth, Ages 60 and 65, 1953-64 and 1964-82.

	At Birth		At Age 60		At Age 65	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1953-64	42.2	45.6	10.0	12.3	7.9	9.6
1964-82	61.6	63.2	14.5	16.4	11.3	12.9

Adapted from Table 9, page 67, in report by National Research Council Committee on Population and Demography, Rapid Population Change in China, 1952-82.

*The U.S. National Research Council's Committee on Population and Demography, in its 1984 report, Rapid Population Change in China, 1952-1982, cites sources indicating an increase in life expectancy, 1953 to 1981, from 42 to 66 for males, and from 46 to 69 for females.

The tendency to underestimate the potentials of a "biomedical revolution" has certainly characterized the American scene, and can be illustrated especially by referring to data about the older population. The same thing might apply to the Chinese case. For example, in 1953, the U.S. Census Bureau projected an elderly population (65 and older) of 20.7 million for 1975. "But when 1975 rolled around, the actual figure was much higher, 22.3 million.".* In the early 1970's, official projections for the year 2000 indicated a 65-plus population of 28.8 million. Today, because of the increase in life expectancy (or the decrease in adult death rates) since 1970, the revised figure for the United States is approximately 36 million! We tend to be very conservative in evaluations of our own country's capacity to reduce mortality rates in the upper age groups.

The Chinese target of 1.2 billion for the year 2000 may itself be on the low side largely because of the progress it, too, might achieve in reducing mortality rates among the adult and elderly age groups, not because of any failure in implementing a one-child-per-family population policy. To be sure, birth and fertility rates are declining, and in all likelihood will continue to decline for some time to come. But even at the currently low rate of population increase, China can still expect an annual increase of 12 million persons.

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*See H.L. Sheppard and S.E. Rix, Ch.3, "The Risky Game of Population Projections," in the The Graying of Working America (New York: Free Press, Macmillan, 1979).

The ultimate challenge lies in the possibility that China's high rate of population growth will be at a rate greater than that of economic growth, according to Liu. To repeat, much of the population growth is due to the progress China has achieved in reducing its death rate, more than it has (until very recently, at least) in reducing its fertility and birth rates. This fact -- a death rate decline greater than for fertility and birth rates -- can be one of the sources of the population problem, especially in a preponderantly rural society of 800 million, in addition to the roughly 200 million in China's urban areas. These comments are not meant as a criticism. Actually we should view positively the progress that China has made in conquering those diseases and illnesses that produce a higher death rate. The comments are made to sensitize ourselves to the new challenges posed by the solution of old problems.

The World Bank reports (more recently than does Liu) that actually, China's population growth rate (1970-80) was only 1.8 percent, well behind the rate of growth in its gross national product, 6 percent.* These figures for China are far more promising than those for other developing countries. If this trend continues, China apparently would be able to provide the support that will be needed for an increased population of nonworking elderly.

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*World Development Report 1984.

The need for population growth control is not only rooted in the problems of feeding a nation of a billion or more, but also in the challenge to create jobs for all or nearly all the working-age population. Liu writes that nearly every year, 20 million Chinese enter the labor force, but only about 2 million can be absorbed.* The pressure for job creation also stems from an increasing labor force participation among women, and a trend toward longer work lives, a natural concomitant of increased life expectancy.

Liu expresses a paradox, best known to economists, namely, that the "Building of socialism [or of any type of modern economy, for that matter -- HLS] requires an adequate sum of construction funds because it is imperative to enlarge production of material values and expand educational, physical, cultural and health undertakings for training and bringing up people so that they can develop morally, intellectually, and physically ... But the overly fast growth of the population since 1949 requires that a big portion of the national income must be earmarked for consumption needs." Thus, if that fast population growth can be controlled, construction and production increases would also ostensibly provide a more adequate base for the provision of services and retirement income to the older population.

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*Professor Harvey Nelsen, Professor of International Studies at the University of South Florida, informs me that there is little or no rural unemployment, but rather massive underemployment in such areas.

Reasons for High Fertility. A major reason for high fertility and/or birth rates in rural areas is both economic and cultural. First of all, it is not very expensive to raise a child in a rural area (with the current agricultural "responsibility system"). A peasant's total family income depends very much on the number of children he has who can be put to work. When you add to this economic dimension the traditional preference for sons who, by and large, remain with parents even after marriage, you can comprehend the reluctance among today's peasants to have a small family, let alone only one child, which is the government's current demand. Sons remaining in the household during the old age of their parents thereby become the supporters of the family's elderly.

The link between (a) such a cultural and economic pattern and (b) problems and policies regarding the elderly is clarified when it is realized that parents in their old age, to a very great extent, still depend on their adult children, especially those in the same household; and that a one-child-per-couple policy, assuming it is followed by the rural population, could mean that if a couple has a daughter born, and not a son, there would be no offspring to help the mother and father in their late, dependent years. A daughter typically joins her husband's household and becomes one of the providers for his

elderly parents. Urban developments and conditions may be changing this type of relationship.

There is yet another link between population patterns and aging policy: to the degree that a Chinese peasant, worker, or "cadre" member can be assured of an adequate retirement security provided by a collective entity -- the productive brigade, the commune, or the state -- he or she would be more willing to have a very small family, and would become less dependent on the individual family. This is the very essence, the basic meaning of the term, social security. Finally, to complete the circle, a lower birth rate, at the present time, would improve the economic conditions on which to build an adequate retirement security system.

This proposition is essentially valid and worthwhile for the contemporary period. However, by about the end of this century, a smaller young population, coupled with a dramatic increase in the older population (a product of earlier high fertility rates and of increased life expectancy) means a dramatic increase in the aged as a percentage of the Chinese population. Keep in mind here that the "aged" in China, as in most, if not all, other developing countries, are defined as 60 and older.

Today, that population percentage is approximately 8 percent. Over the next 15 years, it is expected to rise to about 11 percent (or a little over 100 million). That 8 percent amounts to slightly over 80 million Chinese 60 and older.

But in only 15 years, by the year 2000, China can expect a 63 percent increase in the size of its "old" population -- compared to only a 20 percent growth for its total population. By the end of this century, that expected 130 million population will constitute 11 percent of all of China's numbers. The projected 130 million, as discussed earlier, may prove to be on the low side. In a seminar, in Beijing, we were given projections for the year 2025, pointing to an "old" population of 280 million -- which means that in a mere 25 years after the end of the century, the 60-plus Chinese population will have mushroomed by another 115 percent! By then, 20 percent of a projected total population of 1.4 billion will be in that age group. It is no wonder, then, that the Chinese authorities, policy researchers, gerontologists, and related professional groups are increasingly becoming alerted to aging issues. As discussed below, local structures (and a national one) are being put into place to address the issues, policies, and problems associated with these dramatic population changes.

Contrary to what I had been led to believe before my visit, the Chinese authorities intend to have the limited family policy in force for only one generation. If the policy is successful, and if economic and agricultural development proceeds as planned and hoped for there should be no need to continue a stringent population policy, after 20 years or so. This is particularly true if, as reported by the World Bank, China's economic development continues to progress at a

rate greater than the population growth rate. But this one-generation approach does not seem to be consistent with the PRC's goal, announced in other places, of a much lower population by the year 2040.

As part of the population growth control policy, China is not relying exclusively on a one-child-per-couple policy. There are other measures such as legislation requiring later marriages, i.e., the postponement of marriage by a few years; a mass public education campaign pointing out the advantages to a young couple of having a small family; and special "pension incentives" discussed elsewhere in this essay.

Filial Responsibility. Running throughout much of the literature, and in the orientations we underwent during our visit in China, the recurrent theme of "filial care" was manifested. Much of this consists of references to traditional custom which was the object of scorn during the Cultural Revolution), and much is now even inscribed in contemporary law. "In New China," to quote From Youth to Retirement,* "the custom of filial care has been made into law, with daughters as well as sons responsible for retired parents." The Marriage Law of 1950 even goes so far as to require grandchildren with the financial ability to support grandparents whose offspring are deceased.

Even though in early years the Peoples Republic attempted to weaken the influence of elders, and to eliminate

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*Published by Beijing Review, 1982.

ancestor worship, a social-psychological element in filial responsibility, multi-generation households have not disappeared, particularly in labor-intensive rural areas. Today, there is a de facto sanctioning of such households. In urban areas, housing shortages and longevity are major factors in keeping three or more generations in the same household, even though there are some signs of the development of nuclear-family households.* In my own opinion, "modernization" (including bigger family incomes) could eventually lead to an increased desire for better housing, which includes more rooms per person, and perhaps separate quarters (and at a distance) for grandparents, thus accelerating a nuclear family trend. Urban grandparents themselves might, in the future, also prefer independence and "intimacy at a distance."

The one-child per couple policy has implications for the status of grandparents of such children. An only child may receive greater material support and psychological attention from its mother and father than given to its grandparents, when compared to the traditional patterns of past generations. To the degree that nuclear family support declines for grandparents, the need for some form of extra-familial, collective, or governmental pension and social support systems will be reinforced. To

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*Chen refers to Beijing data showing that only 5 percent of all households in China's capital actually have three or more generations. Xiangming Chen, "The One-Child Population Policy, Modernization and the Extended Chinese Family," in the February/March 1985, issue of Journal of Marriage and the Family. I am grateful to Mr. Chen for his comments on an early draft of this paper, and for allowing me to see the manuscript of his Journal of Marriage and the Family article.

be sure, other factors and forces function to put a brake on this process, e.g., housing shortages, insufficient day-care facilities, etc. The Marriage Law of 1950 also requires support of parents, but this obligation is more easily fulfilled when an adult child has other siblings with whom to share that obligation. The link between population and aging policies is unambiguously reflected in an editorial in the Beijing Review, of September 3, 1984, entitled "Nationwide Concern for Elderly:"

> In order to curb its population growth China is pursuing the one child per couple policy. This will place a heavy burden on only children when the time comes for them to care for their parents, and even their grandparents. ... Chinese leaders have stressed that caring for the elderly is not just the responsibility of their children, but of the whole younger generation. ... from a purely economic view the material and cultural wealth and special skills China is enjoying today stand on the firm foundation laid by its older generation. (emphasis not in the original).

Therefore, the editorial continues, "Supporting the older people is a kind of compensation for the fruit of their labour which everyone is now sharing. It is also a way of repayment for their bringing up the younger generation."

Marxism as an Influence. Another factor of a less traditional nature that may have been influential in the continuity of a high fertility rate pattern as public policy is orthodox Marxism's position in the late 1950's and early 60's regarding population control. In Communist China during that period, the Marxist position (strongly affected for some years by Soviet Russia's version) was apparently adhered to, namely, that the need for family planning is a symptom of the weaknesses inherent in capitalism, a system that is incapable of providing the needs and wants of large populations; and that a socialist society need have no fear of population expansion.* This was Mao's position especially, in that earlier period. In recent years, as we all know, the Peoples Republic of China has become more reality-oriented or pragmatic, and has come to recognize that socialism per se is no basis for ignoring population growth. Despite the Great Soviet Encyclopedia's dictum that "There cannot be any surplus population under a socialist regime ...," one can retort, "More people does not mean better."

Pensions. We were told in several separate orientation sessions at factories and communes that the retirees from those workplaces received 70, and at some sites, as much as 80 percent,

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*For a stimulating discussion of this and other population perspectives, I recommend the French demographer, Alfred Sauvy's Fertility and Survival: Population Problems from Malthus to Mao Tse-Tung, (New York: Collier Books, 1963). The original title in French was De Malthus à Mao Tsé-Toung.

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of their wages as pensions. However, from From Youth to Retirement, we find that:

> Pensions are a percentage of salary which is calculated by length of time on the job, work performance and service to the country (p.84).

The accompanying two tables provide greater details concerning the wide range in pensions as a percentage of former wages ("replacement rates"). These tables apparently refer to urban workers and government employees. The peasant population, as far as I could ascertain, has no widespread systematic pension coverage.

As these tables suggest, the pension range can be from zero to 90 percent of previous wages. For example, if the worker had retired before 1949 (in northeast China's liberated areas), he or she is most likely to be receiving no pension at all, but for those who had joined the revolution (especially during the Japanese invasion before late 1945), they are apparently eligible for a pension equal to 90 percent of former earnings.

These figures not only suggest the well-being of pensioners relative to their most recent pre-retirement standard of living. (All retirees reportedly receive medical care at no cost). They also suggest that, given the rapid increase in years after work cessation (i.e., greater life expectancy after age 60), the Chinese -- as they attempt to expand pension coverage and eligibility -- could be facing a severe challenge

Table II

China's Pension System

Requirements (for retired workers and staff members)	Pension's % of former wages
Those who started after the foundation of New China	
--worked consecutively for more than 10 but less than 15 years	60
--worked consecutively for more than 15 but less than 20 years	70
--worked consecutively for 20 or more years	75
Those who joined revolutionary work during the period of the Liberation War	80
Those who joined revolutionary work during the period of the Anti-Japanese War (on or prior to September 2, 1945)	90

Source: From Youth to Retirement. Xiangming Chen (Duke University) has written to me, saying that those participating in liberation activities before 1938 are entitled to 100% of their salaries and even more.

Table III

Changes in the Pension System

Period	Pension's % of former wages
Old China	No pension except in a few departments or enterprises
Prior to 1949 (in northeast China's liberated areas)	30 to 60
Early post-liberation days	35 to 60
1958-78	40 to 70
1978 to present	60 to 90

Source: From Youth to Retirement

because of pressures to continue to provide adequate pensions for a rapidly growing population of retirees. This challenge will be even more severe to the extent that retirement age remains at 60 for men and 55 for women. Manual workers retire even earlier -- 55 for men, 50 for women. Women "cadres" -- supervisors, etc. -- have a pension age of 55. It is much too early to expect any serious discussion or consideration of proposals in China to raise these retirement ages in response to this challenge, and also to increased life expectancy, reduced youth population, and other factors. But if China comes close to replicating Japan's experience since 1945 (culminating in the emergence of a trend toward a post-60 retirement age policy), such a change could become a plausible feature of its scenario of the future.

Gerontologists, economists, and government officials in China are obviously becoming more aware of and sensitive to the long-term consequences of a one-couple-one-child population policy. One problem encountered in encouraging such a policy, writes Liu, is "how to ensure that the elderly will be looked out for properly. Since the level of our social productive forces is not high and social insurance is not developed, children are the social guarantee of support for aging parents. They provide the guarantee of income and everyday care."

A significant function played by a pension system, on the other hand, is to remove or to reduce the dependence

of people in their old age on sons and daughters. If workers can be assured of a reliable and adequate pension, they have less of a need or incentive to have many children as a source of support when they become old and retired.

In some provinces and cities, workers who have only one child are assured a 5 percent pension "bonus" (as a percent of salary or wages). If couples have no children at all, the pension can be as much as 100 percent of previous earnings. The effectiveness of such an incentive system warrants some empirical research. In this connection, Liu suggests that "as our social services in the cities are at a very low level, these couples are worried that there will be no one to look after them when they are old." He argues for an expansion of the "service trades" and health services -- especially those providing for the needs of the elderly -- in urban areas.

The use of pension bonuses and the advocacy of the creation and expansion of social and health services to quell the fears of old age illustrate once again the principle of a linkage between population and social policy, on the one hand, and old age policy on the other.

For rural areas, the problems of caring for older persons with only one child are not the same as for the urban areas. For one thing, according to Liu, those areas are typically low in their productive capacity and economic

well-being. While the state or the production team may assure the "five guarantees" of food, clothing, medical care, housing, and burial costs, life would still be difficult for older peasants because, again, the general standard of living is not very high in most rural areas. To repeat, 800 million Chinese live in such areas. Chen suggests that China may have to develop regionally or locally based old age strategies and policies.

Gerontological Organizations. In many large cities, local gerontological societies are being formed, made up of government officials, university personnel, and voluntary or neighborhood groups and projects (including homes for the family-less elderly). At the national level, the National Committee on Aging in China (NCAC) is basically a nongovernmental organization which, however, receives state support and has representatives from several ministries and other government agencies. In addition (based on a personal conversation with Mr. Wu Yuan Jin, the Secretary General of the NCAC), its basic membership derives from a constituency of seven mass-member organizations of pensioners. The NCAC is a new and very important element in the growing interest and concern about aging in modern China. A former Marshall of the armed forces, who is also an important party official, is its Honorary Chairman. Its creation was a result of the obvious demographic and economic trends in China, but its formation was probably overtly stimulated by the preparations for the UN World Assembly on Aging in 1982, which required that formal,

government-sanctioned delegations represent each participating country. NCAC's tasks include the following:

1. Support research on the conditions of the elderly.
2. Coordinate programs for and about aging.
3. Arrange and conduct national and regional conferences.

In my meeting with Wu Yuan Jin, I also was told that NCAC is, furthermore, concerned about providing a livelihood or support for the elderly; Mr. Wu feels that this problem is solved now -- through the family and the state; and in the rural areas, by communes and/or production brigades. As for the latter, however, it is my impression gained from other sources that the rural support is to be found primarily in the "relatively prosperous" people's communes and production brigades, through the introduction of pension plans.

NCAC is also developing study and learning programs, and in one province (Szechuan, I believe) it has launched a University for the Aged with courses in philosophy; political economy; medical and health care; creative writing; the art of flower arrangements; etc.

The National Committee (a) publishes a number of different periodicals, published separately in several cities around China, each with a different focus (e.g., The Elderly Chinese; Longevity; and the Aged's Digest; (b) sponsors social activities, and encourages the use of retired workers in "keeping order" in the neighborhood and directing traffic. It advocates the

special employment of writers, engineers, and technicians who, according to Secretary General Wu -- if called back by their pre-retirement enterprises -- are allowed to keep their pensions, in addition to the post-retirement wages earned on a temporary basis. Apparently, there is no "earnings" test that acts as an inhibitor to the successful implementation of such a practice. At the present time, NCAC is busily engaged in a massive educational and publicity campaign to raise the national awareness of the growing population of the elderly and of the need to develop special programs for and by this population. A Beijing Center on Aging is now being planned by NCAC which would encompass not only activities for older persons, but a health center or hospital, with support coming from the state, separate enterprises, and from overseas Chinese.

The Committee is now in correspondence with the Gerontological Society of America (under the leadership of Dr. James Schulz, of Brandeis University) to work out the details and ways and means for co-sponsoring a small conference in 1985, or 1986, in Beijing. As is true of all the individuals and organizations with whom I met, the NCAC is anxious to cooperate in an exchange of information and publications. There should be some way of coordinating such an exchange, especially regarding English language materials published here in the United States -- a program that IECG will explore with appropriate organizations and gerontology centers.

III. Closing Observations

The story of growing and being old in China is one of continuity and change. A new process taking place in China is the growth in urban areas of nuclear families, i.e., families consisting only of husband, wife, and children, without an older generation of grandparents and/or great-grandparents in the household. From the gerontological point of view, we would say that there may be a process of household independence taking place among the urban elderly of the future. This is clearly a new development, but not conclusively the dominant pattern at the present time. The nuclear family emergence may be partly a symptom of changing values, and partly a pattern that is made possible by: (a) an expansion of the "housing stock" in urban areas, and (b) the growth of adequate pension incomes among the urban elderly. Perhaps we are witnessing the appearance of what has taken place in many, if not most, western urban-industrial societies: as older persons are able to enjoy adequate incomes (either as workers or as retirees), they themselves tend toward independence, including the desire for separate living arrangements. None of this tendency is ipso facto a reflection of any change in sentiment regard filial attachments, or loyalty. One can still have intimacy between generations, but it becomes "intimacy at a distance," to use an expression from gerontology.

This nuclear family trend is apparently unique to the urban scene. At the same time, rural areas are witnessing an

increase in the traditional, extended family. This is the natural result, partially, of the increase in life expectancy. More rural Chinese adults are living to be old, and long enough to be grandparents and great-grandparents. But the extended family pattern as a traditional form is also rooted in economics: the rural family benfits economically from having older people in the household. Moreover, it is frequently the case that the older generation owned or dwelled in the living quarters where they were the middle generation, and naturally maintained residency into their grandparenthood. But, as Deborah Davis-Friedmann has reported in her excellent Long Lives: Chinese Elderly and the Communist Revolution,* the older generation can frequently add to the wealth and income of the multi-generation family. Such families are "valuable as units of production."

> This is particularly true in rural areas where pigs, chickens and produce raised outside of the collective sector account for 40 percent of a rural family's total income. In addition, because the work regulations favor the concentration of elderly men and women in these remunerative jobs, the contribution of elderly members is both conspicuous and highly valued. So great, in fact, are the financial gains of three-generation households that rural siblings deprived of parental assistance openly complain about the special advantages of the child living with the parents. (Davis-Friedmann, pp. 42-43).

These observations by Davis-Friedmann appear to be quite different from those by Liu whose portrayal of the lot of the rural elderly is much less optimistic.

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*Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Nevertheless, there should be no questioning of the fact that China's Communist revolution (excluding its "cultural" one) has resulted in improvements in the economic security of that vast country's aged population. This is clearly the position of Davis-Friedmann. She points out that (1) few fear death from starvation in their old age; and (2) collective ownership means less dependence on providing financially for oneself in old age, or placing the total "burden" only on the offspring (although it is not clear whether the recent "privatization" of farms -- or the "responsibility system" -- will produce deviations from collective responsibility).* Even older workers in the collectivitized rural enterprises ("communes" or "brigades") share in the "current surpluses unimaginable in the years before 1949," even if the labor performed by the old is of a menial, low-level nature.

In the emerging urban areas, a growing number of persons can be assured of an adequate pension upon their retirement. Indeed -- and this may be a paradox to Westerners, especially in the United States -- the urban youth in China, Davis-Friedmann tells us, are not the automatically favored beneficiaries of urbanization and industrialization. The beneficiaries are instead (at least at present) the elderly. Until very recently, at least, urban retirees even enjoyed the privilege of "bequeathing" their pre-retirement position to a son.

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*See Orville Schell's report, "The Wind of Wanting to Go It Alone," in The New Yorker, January 28, 1984.

China is just now beginning to become alerted to the beginnings of a "graying" of its population, resulting from increased longevity and reduced fertility. The many people and organizations we met with are keen about planning now for a society in which an ever and ever higher proportion of their population will be old. They have not reached the point of having especially an "old-old" population (around 80 and older), but they know they are moving in that direction. Our own problems and challenges associated with a large population in that age group might be worth their learning about. Long-term care; housing; mental health; and other needs and problems are among the urgent topics that will call for approaches and policies that China may not have begun to experience to the degree we have.

Above all, China is a society strongly dominated by traditionalism which is, however, undergoing the strains of, and the need for, changes associated with that country's heralded drive toward modernization. All of this ineluctably places the phenomenon of aging within a context of exciting opportunities for a country which has grown and survived for centuries numbering far beyond our own country's existence. In this respect, we have much to learn from the Chinese.

U.S. Aging and Mental Health Delegation

to Peoples Republic of China

May 23 - June 9, 1984

Jacob Brody, M.D.
National Institute on Aging

Ernest Gruenberg, M.D.
Professor Emeritus
John Hopkins University
Medical Center

Mary Harper, Ph.D., R.N.
Center for Aging
National Institute
of Mental Health

Robert Katzman, M.D.
School of Medicine
University of California
San Diego

Soon Koh, M.D.
Psychology Department
University of Illinois
at Chicago

Ton He Koh, Ph.D.
Division of Research
Chicago Board of Education

William T. Liu
Pacific/Asian American
Mental Health Research Center
University of Illinois
at Chicago

Ethel Shanas, Ph.D.
Department of Sociology
University of Illinois
at Chicago

Harold L. Shepppard, Ph.D.
International Exchange
Center on Gerontology
Unversity of South Florida

Conrad Taeuber, Ph.D.
Population Research Center
Georgetown University

Gary Tishler, M.D.
Department of Psychiatry
Yale University Medical Center

Elena Yu, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Pacific/Asian America
Mental Health Research Center
University of Illinois at Chicago

IV. Persons and Organizations Visited

Gerontology and Sociology

Mr. Wu Yuanjin, National Committee on Aging in China, Beijing
Dr. Wang Zhan-shuen, President, Shanghai Gerontological Society
Professor Yuan Ji-Hui, Chairman, Department of Sociology, Shanghai University
Jiang Yong-Kang, Vice Chairman, Department of Sociology, Shanghai University
Professor Yuan Fang, Chairman, Department of Sociology, Peking University

Shanghai Psychiatric Hospital and Shanghai Institute of Mental Health

Dr. Wang Chang-hua, Director
Dr. Yan He-jun, Vice Director
Dr. Xu Chang-lin, Chief, Community Mental Health Service Department
Dr. Minghuan Zhang
Professor Xia Zhengyi, Advisor, Shanghai Psychiatric Hospital and Professor of Psychiatry, Shanghai First Medical College
Mr. Hu Jin-rong, Bureau of Foreign Affairs

Beijing Medical College

Dr. Peng Rui-Cong, Vice Chancellor
Mr. Li Bing-zhang, Bureau of Foreign Affairs
Ms. Tian Ying, Bureau of Foreign Affairs
Dr. Shen Yu-Cun, Director, Beijing Institute of Mental Health
Dr. Li Cong-Pei, Vice Director, Beijing Institute of Mental Health
Dr. Li Tianling, Associate Professor, Division of Social Medicine and Health Statistics
Dr. Wang Shao-Xian, Associate Professor, Division of Social Medicine and Health Statistics
Dr. Xu Lu-xi Professor of Anatomy
Dr. Lu Kuo-Cheng

Traditional Chinese Medicine

Dr. Wang Jin-Yun, Associate Professor and Director, Zhejiang Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Hangzhou

Occupational Therapy Group in Shanghai

Mr. Sung Long-Ruen, Chao-Yang New Village, Second Village, Number 7,
Occupational Therapy Group, Pu-Two District, Shanghai

Home for the Aged

Mr. Zhang Yu-lin, Shanghai City No. 1, Social Welfare Institution, 475
Wan Pin Nan Lu, Zuhui District, Shanghai

Others

Ho-xin Liu, Department of Philosophy, Shanghai University
Dr. Qi Shi, Deputy Director, Shanghai Municipal Health Bureau
Dr. Rong-kui Huan, Deputy Director, Office of Education and Public Health, Shanghai Municipal Peoples's Government
Mr. An-qin Shi, Office of Population Research, Institute of Sociology, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences

FLORIDA GERONTOLOGISTS VISIT CHINA*

Gordon F. Streib, Ph.D.
Graduate Research Professor
Center for Gerontological Studies
University of Florida

China is a country of great interest to gerontologists because its elderly are closely integrated into the society and have traditionally been regarded with high esteem. They live in joint households with their children and grandchildren, and carry on many daily activities in a cooperative manner.

Being aware of these facts and wishing to compare the situation of the elderly in two vastly different societies, the United States and China, I was eager to join a group of 26 Floridians - experts in the aging and health fields, who visited China in the fall of 1983. Under the leadership of John L. Stokesberry, Director of the Florida State Unit on Aging, we consulted with officials concerned with aging, visited health facilities, observed housing arrangements for older people, and gained information about their daily lives.

We learned that China has a population over one billion persons, of whom eighty million (8 percent) are over the age of 60. China recognizes that it has a serious danger of over population, for by the year 2000, the population will

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reach an estimated 1.3 billion persons and the 11 percent who will be 60 and older will constitute about 143 million persons. One of the major goals of government planning in contemporary China is a lowering of the birthrate. This will result in families of smaller size and a higher ratio of elderly pensioners to younger wage earners. There will be many more people who reach old age without surviving children to care for them. In the past few years, the Chinese have begun to realize that while they do not consider the elderly to be a "social problem" at this time, the projected increase in the elderly will cause strains in the future. The care of the elderly, traditionally considered to be a family matter, will increasingly become a concern of the commune and the state.

Retirement Provisions

When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, retirement plans were initiated for urban workers. The normal retirement age is 60 for men, 50 for women who do physical work, and 55 for women in other kinds of work. A full retirement pension is approximately 75 percent of one's last wages, and requires that a person complete 15 years of work.

For the 80 percent of the people who are rural dwellers, the economic provisions are the responsibility first of their sons, and then of their danwei (workplace) or commune. There is no funded state pension for them. As members of the commune,

they receive a share of the grain or crops. Most men keep on working after 60, caring for animals, helping in the orchards or fields, removing manure, etc. Collective ownership has eliminated the need for elderly persons to establish their own financial security in old age, says the sociologist Davis-Friedmann (1983), the author of a recently published book, Long Lives: Chinese Elderly and the Communist Revolution. "As lifetime partners in a collectively owned enterprise, elderly citizens share in the profits even when they are physically unable to hold full-time jobs" (p. 107). She adds that a few wealthy communes have inaugurated a pension system.

At the time of land reform, following the creation of the People's Republic of China, the "five guarantees" were put into practice in the communes for the elderly who have no families. These guarantee food, clothing, medical care, housing, and burial expenses. The guarantees were designed at the national level, but the financing, staff, and administration are local rural responsibilities.

Young family members are not released from their responsibility for the care of older family because of the five guarantees. Parish and Whyte (1978) report that only a small number of persons receive the aid - about 6 percent of all people over the age of 60. They conclude: "For the vast majority of old people in rural Kwantang, support is the obligation of the family, not the collective or the state...

Much of the direct assistance in villages, then, runs in traditional channels, those based on family obligations and individual feelings of compassion" (p.76). They note that whether a person lives securely or not is related to whether he or she can engage in private endeavors, such as raising pigs, chickens, or vegetables for sale.

Homes of Respect for the Elderly

A recent development in communes to assist elderly who do not have families is the provision of retirement homes, called "Homes of Respect for the Elderly." One of the communes we visited had opened their first home of this kind in January, 1983, nine months earlier. We were told that people had been apprehensive about living together with non-family members, but had been pleasantly surprised at how harmonious it was. In order to give the home high standing, the administrator who was selected was the retired chairman of the entire commune. It was felt that his managerial expertise and high standing would help to launch this innovative institution and give it a positive image.

Commune members are very proud of the fact that the commune bore the entire cost of construction of the home with no assistance from the province. At the time of our visit, there were 22 residents and five staff, as well as the director. During the daytime, the residents take care of vegetable gardens and the flower garden for the hospital, which is right next door to the old folks home. A pigsty

and a poultry barn are currently under construction.

The residents play cards, chess, mah jong, tell stories, and occasionally see a movie. Currently, they do not have a television, but we were told that a 24-inch color television set is on order. The retirement home was purposely built next door to the hospital, and if someone should become ill and be unable to go to the hospital, the doctor can call easily at the home. Friends and co-workers visit the residents, especially on weekends and holidays. The guests bring fruit, cakes, and candy; and the former brigade and team members are partially responsible for the support of those who have been placed in the home from their brigade.

Medical Care

In contemporary China, the practice of medicine is now returning to a combination of Western and traditional Chinese medicine. During the political stuggles and the cultural revolution in 1966-1976, Western medicine was out of favor, and the "barefoot doctors" (young people given three months of training) were widely used. However, with the dramatic reversal in government policy, physicians who have been trained in medical schools are back in charge. Our delegation visited a rehabilitation hospital, the Lake Tai Hu Convalescent Center, a 400-bed facility for chronic non-contagious diseases, such as hypertension, arthritis, nephritis, diabetes, etc. The facility has a staff of 170, and we were briefed by Mr. Li Gian, secretary to the director. He explained

that there is a three-month limit on the length of stay of the patients in the Center. The staff employs a combination of Western and traditional Chinese medical practices. There is a fully equipped laboratory, as well as X-Ray and EKG equipment, and a pharmacy. All medical, nursing, and pharmaceutical care is free. Patients can be readmitted, if it is necessary, but there is currently a long waiting list. Patients receive a combination of therapies, including electrotherapy and chemotherapy, as well as acupuncture and massage. There is a heavy emphasis on diet and exercise. We saw the physical therapy room with an exercise class in progress. We also saw the hot wax treatment room where two men with painful arthritic knees were being treated, a massage room where several delegates took advantage of a brief massage treatment, and finally, an acupuncture room where six patients were being treated.

A Visit to a Chinese Home

In another commune that we visited, we were taken to the home of a 60-year-old woman who lived with her two sons, their wives, and one grandson. The home was a complex of several small buildings, with a courtyard between some of the buildings. The woman takes care of her grandson until the parents come home from work, does the shopping and housework, and cooks the noon meal. The evening meal preparation is shared with the daughters-in-law. She also raises vegetables and flowers, and frequently visits with

her elderly neighbors. She commented that "A good next-door neighbor is better than a faraway relative."

Housing

The members of the family in rural China save jointly for many years before beginning construction of a house. Then it is usually built in stages, with new room being added when enough money has been saved to buy the bricks. Housing is in short supply, so that intergenerational living is a necessity. Despite two decades of housing construction in urban areas, the growth of the population has resulted in a decrease in the per capita living space. The average floor space per person in Chinese cities was only 3.6 square meters in 1977, and according to the report of Ma Hong (1983), a Chinese economist and adviser to the State Planning Commission, there are 6.25 million families without adequate housing. Urban apartments are designed to accommodate four people, and this design discourages any move for separate residences for the elerly.

There are additional economic incentives for the generations to live together. The older person who is retired and has a pension and then finds a second job in retirement may make a larger contribution to the family's income than other family members. Another economic imperative that keeps the generations together is a provision that is permitted under the Communist system: the job of a retiring factory or office worker may be turned over to a son or daughter. This

is a significant benefit for young family members. Butterfield (1982) noted that at a large petrochemical works in Lanzhou with 36,000 workers, an official reported that of the 600 workers who retire each year, virtually all are replaced by their children. Such a practice would be considered nepotism in the United States, and would be illegal under our equal opportunity statutes.

Roles of the Elderly

We observed throughout our visit that the elderly (both men and women) were performing many important roles - taking care of children, shopping for the families' daily food, washing clothes (often in a small pail in the street) and hanging them out to dry. The fronts of buildings were festooned with drying clothing and the task of putting them out on bamboo poles and removing them when dry occupies a considerable amount of time. We could see into people's apartments, and often drying clothing seemed to occupy a good part of the room space. In rural areas, gardening, raising chickens and ducks, and selling vegetables and eggs at the free market are important in augmenting the family income. In the city, retired people help with parking and traffic control, sweep the street, and perform other duties of benefit to the community.

It was clear that the Chinese elderly indeed have many important roles and furnish valuable services to their children and grandchildren. It should be added that most American

retirees would not want to build their lives around providing services to younger family members, particularly to younger family members, particularly to daughters-in-law. American women do not have the same special status in relation to their sons' wives as do Chinese women. In the United States, it is considered most desirable to avoid interfering with the younger woman's household and "keep one's distance." Thus the two systems are in sharp contrast.

Health and Physical Fitness

There is great emphasis on diet and exercise in China. Keeping healthy is not just an individual matter, but is considered one's responsibility to the state. American visitors to China are intrigued with the fact that in many places one sees old and young engaging in ritualized exercises called Tai Ji Quan. This discipline involves about a hundred different exercise postures. Motions are slow and smooth, in fact the slower one moves, the more adept he or she is considerered to be. The exercises evolved from a variety of old Chinese sources and are a combination of the mental and the physical. Tai Ji, as it is commonly called, is practiced singly and in groups, and there are formal classes for both old and young. The popularity of Tai Ji in China is obvious to even the short-term visitor because it is practiced in public - on the streets, the sidewalks, and in parks and playgrounds. Probably a major reason for this public exercise is that Chinese homes are very small, and the amount of

individual space available even for gentle exercise is limited. Hence, public space is used for this very salubrious kind of exercise for old and young.

A Meeting with a Chinese Delegation

Gerontology is a new field of interest in China. A new official group has recently been formed: the China National Committee on Aging; we met in Beijing with the Deputy Director and a delegation of his staff. He reported that the major goals of the China National Committee on Aging are: (1) to conduct research on aging and determine the needs of the elderly; (2) to develop a plan to meet those needs; and (3) to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. The Chinese two-year plan, 1983-85, calls for a thorough demographic study of the current conditions of the elderly in all of China's provinces.

At about the same time, China plans to launch an extensive public awareness campaign to teach respect for the elderly. It would be particularly aimed at young people. The government intends to act as an advocate and to protect the rights of the elderly, and to reasses continually their needs. The program will concentrate first in the urban areas, then move to the suburbs, and finally to the rural areas where 80 percent of China's population live.

The plan is also intended to begin capital construction which will provide special hospitals, recreational facilities, and workshops for the elderly. The program will encourage

the elderly to do volunteer work, especially with young people. Our group felt that there was a genuine sensitivity and desire to enhance intergenerational programs. This, I think, is consistent with a long tradition of intergenerational contacts in the Chinese culture. The Chinese spokesmen were keenly aware that as the elderly population passes the 100 million mark, one of their largest problems will be what to do with everyone's spare time.

Respect and Veneration in a Revolutionary Society

Respect and veneration for older persons is a deep-rooted tradition in Chinese culture and religion which goes back many centuries. It is one facet of the pre-revolutionary culture that the Communist government has supported. Respect for parents and emphasis on filial obligation insures that the care of old people is a family responsibility. This relieves the state of providing support and services to millions of its citizens. Indeed, the 1951 law requires family members to take care of old relatives.

The pre-revolutionary family systems has been changed in other aspects, however, resulting in reduced power of the elderly. Examples are the collective ownership of property, rejection of the arranged marriage system, and the ban on large families. In the area of family life, the revolutionary regime has followed a course of pragmatic adaptation. In other spheres the establishment of People's Republic has made drastic changes in a shift toward the collective owner-

ship of the means of production and emphasis upon a socialist economy - despite shifts and turns during 30 years - has resulted in the eradication of the kind of extreme poverty and deprivation that were part of the old regime, and hence there has been a great improvement in the situation of most of the elderly. Although there are still scarcities of material goods, readily acknolwedged by the government, there is a determined effort to improve the standard of living through the Four Modernizations. This is an economic development plan that will provide China with a powerful economy focussing on agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology.

In short, the Communist revolution has overturned deeply seated norms, roles and relationships, but in certain areas there has been an adaptation of the traditional culture when it does not conflict with socialist ideology and the collective ownership of the means of production. Socialist ideology and collectivism have been quietly married to a changed family system that includes the care of older family members.

The Aged and Future for China

With the slow modernization of the country - industrialization, urbanization, greater mobility, and smaller sized families, the government is aware that other groups than the family will become involved in the care of the elderly. In rural areas the use of the Five Guarantees for old people who have no families and the recent establishment of homes

for pensioners represent a shift toward a modern care system for an aging population. The need for collective rather than individual family solutions for care of the elderly will probably escalate rapidly as the population ages.

Societies of the West, like the United States and Canada, confront the gerontological reality of an aging population from the position of considerable material prosperity, small families, and a mobile population in which family members are often widely separated. Overlaid upon these structural conditions is a pension, health and welfare system that encompasses almost all of the elderly. Western societies have reached the stage of modernization that China's leaders aspire to attain. The issue is whether Western societies can maintain this level of material prosperity over the next decades, and whether these material resources can be allocated to the old as they have been in the past or whether there will be a need to rethink and reformulate how income and services will be redistributed from younger to older people.

China faces the hope of a rising level of material goods and services, but Western societies may be facing a decline in what is available. This decline is a realistic forecast, given the predicted dependency ratios in the decades ahead and the increasing resistance to paying higher taxes, both by the elderly and the young.

Conclusions

What are some of the comparisons of the markedly different systems? In China, the elderly have cradle-to-grave support, family cohesiveness, security, and the expectation that the continuity of life will be unbroken. On the other hand, we have freedom of choice, and the expectation that new surprises await us. The Chinese have a more equitable system than we do, without the extremes found in our society. However, our poorest 20 percent of the elderly have many more material advantages than the average elderly person in China.

A broad generalization comparing China and the United States in their treatment of the elderly highlights a basic contrast: when you venerate the old, as in China, you venerate the past. When you venerate youth, as in the United States, you venerate the future. You venerate the potential - change - growth. When critics of our society point out that our culture does not assign highest status to the elderly, they fail to acknowledge the societal outcomes of such priorties.

Thus, as I returned from a brief but intensive exposure to Chinese culture, I had many conflicting impressions and emotions. I appreciate the advantages of their mutual interdependence, their responsibility and kindliness, their simple acceptance of of the inevitability of dependency. Yet I came back from my trip feeling fortunate that I am a product of my culture, with all of its shortcomings. I do not want to live with

my children, rear my grandchildren, and devote my time to soil, and keeping house for my married children and their families. To this Westerner, the lot of the Chinese elderly seemed lacking in stimulation and devoid of new experience. When I considered the interesting opportunities awaiting many older Americans - the change to pursue new interests, to travel, to serve the community and enlarge their horizons, I came home feeling fortunate indeed.

David Crystal (1982) has observed that the elderly can be roughly divided into two categories: the frail and the frisky. American society, with its emphasis on independence, free choice, and self-determination seems to favor the the frisky - those retired persons with good health and an adequate pension. In accordance with the Older Americans Act, they have the freedom to live their lives as they choose, spend their money as they please, and participate in activities or withdraw. While they are not "needed" as are the Chinese elderly, they can offer their talents in community or family activities if they choose.

Chinese society, in contrast, carries many advantages for the frail. Because of the norm of reciprocity and orientation to the family group, there is an acceptance of dependency as an inevitable part of growing old. Thus, both societies have their advantages and both have their deficiencies. American policy makers, practitioners and researchers have become more aware of the frail elderly in recent years. We

can look to China as having distinctive answers, congruent with their cultural patterns, for this growing segment of the population.

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Note: The Four Modernizations and the sudden shift to an entrepreneurial economy are bringing about vast changes in all parts of Chinese society. For a recent account, see: Orville Scheel, "The Wind of Wanting To Go It Alone," The New Yorker, Vol. LIx, No. 49, January 23, 1984, pp. 43-85.

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Tampa

Harold L. Sheppard
Director

International Exchange Center
On Gerontology
University of South Florida
Box 3208
Tampa, Florida 33620

(813) 974-3468